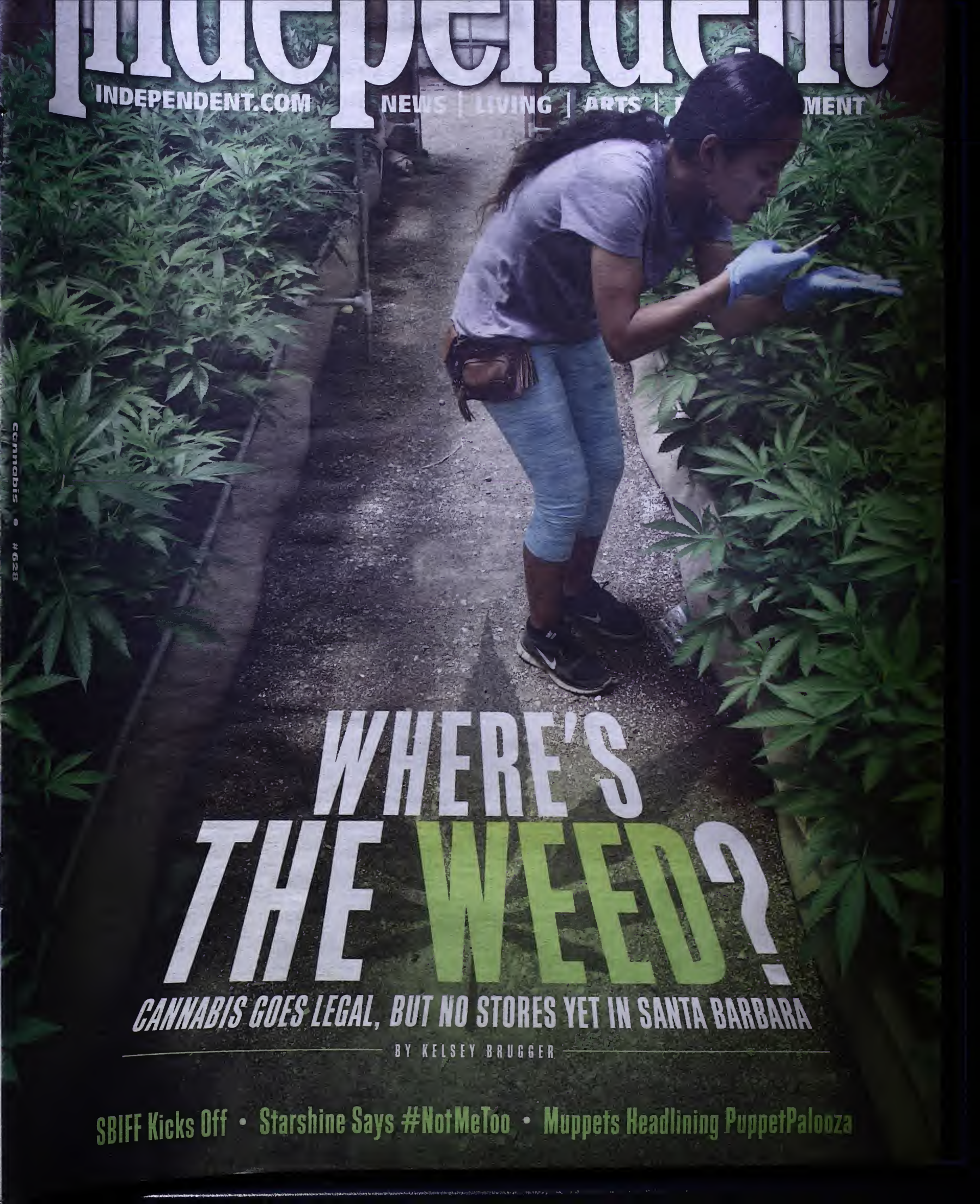


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WHERE'S **THE WEED?**

CANNABIS GOES LEGAL, BUT NO STORES YET IN SANTA BARBARA

BY KELSEY BRUGGER

SBIFF Kicks Off • Starshine Says #NotMeToo • Muppets Headlining PuppetPalooza

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Where's the Weed?

**Cannabis Goes Legal, but
No Stores Yet in Santa Barbara**

(Kelsey Brugger)

ON THE COVER: A harvest manager tends to an area
cannabis greenhouse. File photo by Paul Wellman.

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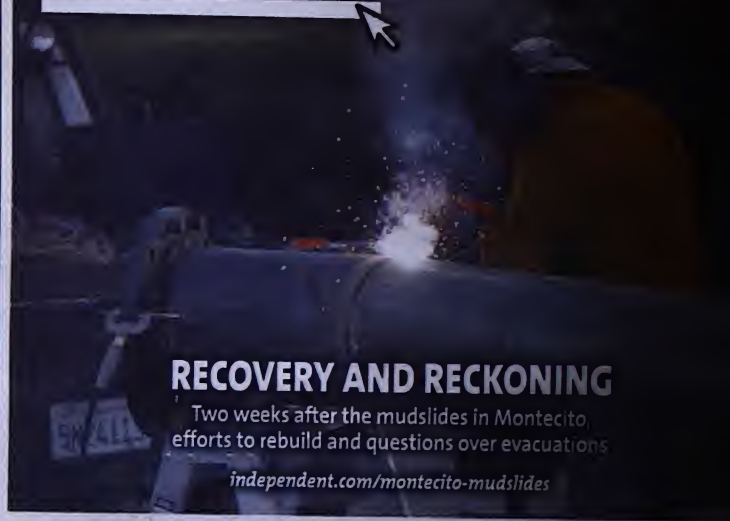
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BABY LOVE

Elijah Lee Bryant was welcomed into the world on January 20 at 4:20 a.m. by his proud parents, Brandi Rivera and Victor Bryant. Measuring in at 5 pounds, 12 ounces, and 18 centimeters tall, Elijah arrived eight days before his due date. "No amount of time would have prepared us for the amount of love we feel for this little guy," said Brandi, who's also the publisher of the *Santa Barbara Independent*. She and Victor had decided months ago to name their first-born Elijah, a name that, incidentally, harks back to the prophet born of fire and flood — trials we know all too well. This little guy, however, brightens our world.



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by **KELSEY BRUGGER** @kelseybrugger, **KEITH HAMM**, **TYLER HAYDEN** @TylerHayden1, **NICK WELSH**, and **JEAN YAMAMURA**, with *INDEPENDENT STAFF*

DISASTER

Lost in Translation

Mixed Messages Plagued Montecito Disaster Warnings

by **Tyler Hayden**
and **Jean Yamamura**

Santa Barbara County officials made great efforts to warn residents of the hazards to life and limb that could result from the predicted January 9 storm. They used exceptionally strong language for government employees—"significant threat," "critical situation," "clear and present danger"—to describe how the heavy rains that were forecast to pound the South Coast might trigger flash flooding and mudslides in the Thomas Fire burn scar. Emails, texts, and Facebook messages were sent. Phone calls were made. A press conference was organized.

In the end, only 15 percent of residents under mandatory evacuation orders actually left their homes, a startlingly low figure attributed alternately to Thomas Fire evacuation fatigue, a defiance of Mother Nature, or a more general misunderstanding of the awesome power of debris flows.

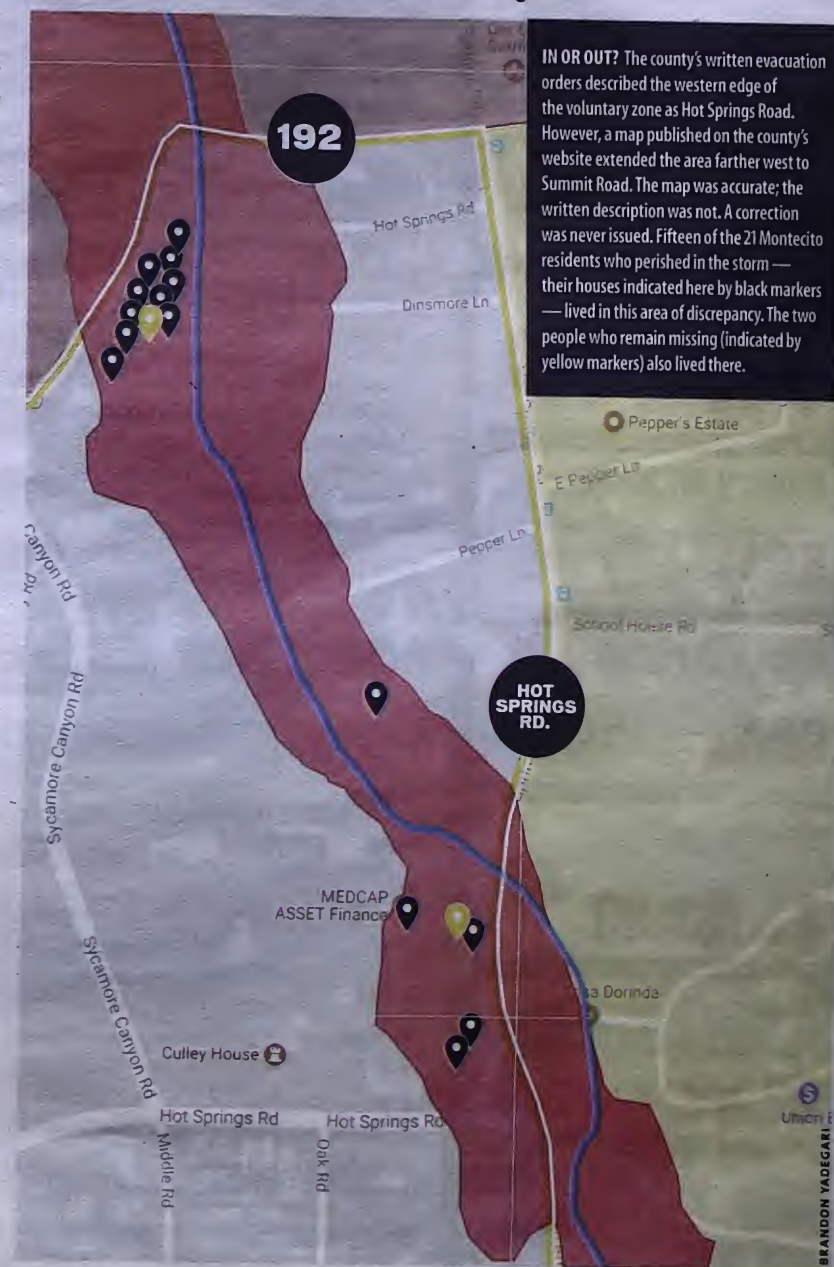
But as we learn more of the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the 21 people confirmed killed in one of the worst disasters in Santa Barbara history, the consistency and accuracy of the official warnings are coming under scrutiny. And as we discover mistakes in the information that authorities disseminated, questions are surfacing as to whether better decisions could have been made.

Robert Lewin, director of the county's Office of Emergency Management (OEM), admitted this week that his department issued conflicting evacuation instructions at 7 p.m. on Sunday, January 7, approximately 30 hours before the storm hit. "Regrettably ... I approved a press release and Facebook [post] that had discrepancies with the western boundary of our intended voluntary evacuation area," he said in a prepared statement.

That press release described the voluntary boundaries as Highway 192 to the north, the ocean to the south, Olive Mill Road to the east, and Hot Springs Road to the west. News agencies reported the borders this way, and the Sheriff's Office posted the same information on its website. However, a map published on the county's own website included a larger voluntary evacuation zone that extended farther west to Summit Road.

The map was accurate, said Lewin; the written description was not. A correction was never issued, and county officials remained unaware of the discrepancy until this Sunday, when reporters inquired about the contradictory information.

Fifteen of the 21 Montecito residents who perished in the storm lived in this area — under voluntary evacuation orders, according to the map, but under no evacuation order.



IN OR OUT? The county's written evacuation orders described the western edge of the voluntary zone as Hot Springs Road. However, a map published on the county's website extended the area farther west to Summit Road. The map was accurate; the written description was not. A correction was never issued. Fifteen of the 21 Montecito residents who perished in the storm — their houses indicated here by black markers — lived in this area of discrepancy. The two people who remain missing (indicated by yellow markers) also lived there.

old Lydia Sutthithepa — also lived west of Hot Springs Road.

Two others lived in the voluntary area described in the January 7 press release. Only four fatalities had lived within the mandatory evacuation borders.

The east-west line of Highway 192, below the Thomas Fire burn scar, was used to divide Montecito into two distinct emergency notice regions: Mandatory evacuation orders were issued north of the boundary, and voluntary notices were made below the highway.

The 7,000 residents in the mandatory zone were told on January 7 to leave their homes immediately. Sheriff's deputies went door-to-door the next day to repeat the order. The 23,000 people in the voluntary area were

escape the trains of mud and rock that came crashing through their neighborhoods.

The county had never before drawn a flood evacuation map for Montecito, and these evacuation zones were originally developed after the 2009 Jesusita Fire. The Sheriff's Office, which is responsible for drawing and enforcing emergency-time boundaries, determined it needed a fast way to select easily identifiable areas and the intersections required to keep them closed. "The 192 is the only straight east-west arterial that there was," said Sheriff Bill Brown in an earlier interview. "Everything else was a winding spaghetti of neighborhood streets." As a result, the Montecito zones were not drawn to follow the downstream flow of creek channels.

NEWS BRIEFS

ENVIRONMENT

The State Lands Commission's \$800,000 effort to properly cap Becker Well — a relic oil well that has been leaking onto Summerland Beach for years — has been delayed. The agency had planned on anchoring a barge off Summerland to begin the re-abandonment work this weekend, but water quality remains poor and there's a low swell in the forecast. The new tentative start date is 2/26.

Tapping public energy during an emergency is the subject of an Environmental Defense Center (EDC) project, which hopes to open the way to volunteers, who appeared in droves after the 2015 Refugio Oil Spill. The effort just got a \$7,300 check in the arm from The Fund for Santa Barbara. Since Refugio, EDC has been looking at weaknesses in emergency preparedness, oil spill response, and community outreach and communications. "Facing new offshore oil leasing threats from the Trump administration and a massive push for near onshore oil drilling in Santa Barbara County," said Linda Krop, EDC's chief counsel, "we need to be better prepared for the next inevitable oil spill."

EDUCATION

Aiming to add another layer of safety and emergency preparedness across its 20 campuses and downtown administrative headquarters, Santa Barbara Unified School District will soon start fielding applications for a newly created management position. Among other duties, the Safety Coordinator will oversee special projects, such as CPR and EpiPen training, for example, and have a hand in all aspects of school safety — from OSHA practices to hazardous-materials disposal — while coordinating emergency preparedness with outside agencies. The application window is expected to open sometime this spring.

CIVIL RIGHTS


The history of Pacific Pride Foundation will be archived at the UCSB Library's Special Research Collections, to preserve and give access to documents capturing Santa Barbara's gay rights movement. Calling Pacific Pride's record rich, powerful, and emotional, Executive Director Colette Schabram said her foundation "has been instrumental in the fight against HIV/AIDS, in the struggle for marriage equality, and a leader in dignity and equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in our community for over 40 years." UCSB archivist Zak Liebhaber continues to search for records such as press clippings, newsletters, scrapbooks, board minutes, administrative files, correspondence, event and subject files, audiovisual material, and photographs for the collection.

COUNTY

A day before a highly anticipated Planning Commission hearing on cannabis, a new 3rd District

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21st Mudflow Victim Found

With the discovery of Faviola Benitez Calderon's body on January 20, the death toll inflicted by Montecito's January 9 avalanche of mud and boulders has risen to 21. With two persons still missing, it's sure to hit 23.

In Sacramento, Governor Jerry Brown declared Monday a Day of Remembrance and ordered flags flown at half-staff. Among the dead, the governor noted, were a 3-year-old and an 89-year-old celebrating his birthday. Two families lost at least three members. Victims, he said, included a teacher, a surgeon, a scoutmaster, and a Korean War veteran.

Calderon was a 28-year-old mother of two and immigrant from Mexico who worked as a housekeeper and nanny. Her 10-year-old son, Jonathan, also died; her husband, Victor, who runs a landscaping business, and her 2-year-old son, Ian, managed to survive and are reportedly recuperating at Cottage Hospital.

Calderon was described as "a bright light" by her neighbor Lori Ann Lieberman. "She was wonderful, kind, gentle, a great cook, a gracious hostess, and always had a twinkle in her eye," recalled Cassie Neumann, whose Houston-based family spent the past three summers living next to Calderon and her extended family. "Our doors were always open. Her kids played with my kids. There was always a basketball hoop in the cul-de-sac, and the kids were either there or on the trampoline in her yard," said Neumann. "She was always giving the kids Popsicles."

While Montecito is overwhelmingly white — 92 percent according to the 2010 census — nearly half the debris-flow victims were immigrants. And for immigrant families seeking relief, that's a serious issue, said Lucas Zucker with the immigrant rights



NOT FORGOTTEN: Faviola Benitez Calderon and her son Jonathan died in the mudflow.

organization CAUSE (Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy). "Ten thousand people lived in Montecito. Many of these people had maids, housekeepers, nannies, gardeners, and personal assistants, and many of them were undocumented," Zucker said. "As such, they're not eligible for FEMA assistance."

To fill this gap, CAUSE and two other Central Coast immigrant rights organizations have just launched 805 UndocuFund (805undocufund.org), modeled after a similar venture that emerged to provide assistance to undocumented workers in Northern California in the wake of October's deadly Tubbs Fire. Backing this effort with \$100,000 in startup seed money is Direct Relief.

Suzanne Grimmesey of County Behavioral Wellness said the Local Recovery and Assistance Center that opened last week — a one-stop-shopping space located in Calvary Chapel on Calle César Chávez to connect those in need with the multitude of state, local, and federal agencies — has been taking pains to create a safe space for immigrants, regardless of legality. "FEMA doesn't ask about your status," Grimmesey said.

—Nick Welsh

NEWS BRIEFS CONT'D FROM P.9

family emergency out of the area, said 3rd District Supervisor Joan Hartmann at a prior meeting. A past member of the Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission, Parke said in a statement he believes agriculture "has proven to be the most constant part of the County's economy and most valuable component of our quality of life."

BUSINESS

The same week it was announced that Downtown Organization (DO) executive Maggie Campbell had resigned, Chamber of Commerce President Ken Oplinger announced he'd been hospitalized after suffering a heart attack. Oplinger has since been released from St. John's Medical Center in Oxnard and said he expects to be back at the job in a couple of days. Campbell's relations with City Hall had long been fraught, she was

was scaring shoppers away from downtown by accentuating the negative rather than the possible. Campbell couldn't be reached for comment. Members of the DO board, fearful of possible litigation, explained only, "This is an unresolved personnel matter and we can't discuss it." Boardmember Dave Lombardi leads the DO in the interim.

Women's Economic Ventures (WEV) has established a website (relief.wevonline.org/bizdisasterrecovery) that collects resource information for businesses, nonprofits, and individuals suffering the aftereffects of the Thomas Fire and subsequent flood. Among the listings are Small Business Administration low-interest disaster loans, WEV's own loan program, insurance and unemployment help, and where to get updates and advice in English and Spanish. Also, Santa

NEWS of the WEEK CONT'D



MUDFLOW

ROCKPILE: Heavy equipment works to clear the Cold Spring debris basin, filled by an epic 200-year burst of rain.

From the Fire into the Surf

How Montecito Mud Winds Up at Goleta Beach

by Melinda Burns

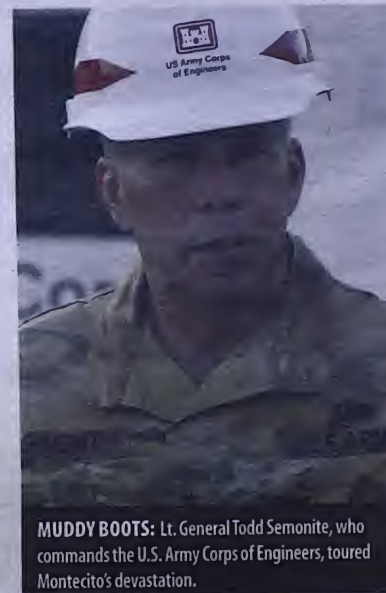
A whiff of charred wood comes off the piles of black mud that are dumped daily into the ocean at Goleta Beach State Park, part of the cleanup of Montecito in the wake of the catastrophic January 9 debris flow. It's mud from the Thomas Fire burn area in the mountains behind the community, and, according to Seth Shank, a senior environmental planner with County Flood Control, it will look like beach sand within 24 hours.

"Beach nourishment, that's what we call it," he said, noting that there is now a strip of sand at high tide where there had been none in recent years. "You can smell the fire, but it's really beach-compatible — coarse-grained and sandy without a lot of clay."

The beach may be coming back, but the water's unhealthy. Swimming and surfing are off-limits at Goleta Beach, Arroyo Burro Beach, Carpinteria State Beach, El Capitan State Beach, Hope Ranch Beach, Leadbetter Beach, Summerland Beach, and Hammond's Beach because of high levels of bacteria in the water, County Public Health officials said on Wednesday. The county is conducting weekly ocean water sampling along the coast.

Since January 11, Shank said, County Public Works crews have dumped between 10,000 and 13,000 cubic yards of mud at Goleta Beach, averaging about 100 truckloads per day. That's less than the 15,000 cubic yards that were dumped on the beach after a routine cleanup in the Goleta Slough last fall, he said. During the very wet winter of 1995, by comparison, 500,000 cubic yards of mud from the slough were deposited onto Goleta Beach, Shank said.

East of Montecito, the sand and silt that poured into the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Reserve from Franklin and Santa Monica creeks on January 9 is being dredged out and dumped into the ocean at Ash Avenue — more than 14,000 cubic yards to date. "Out of an abundance of caution," a Public Health press release said, the public is barred from



MUDDY BOOTS: Lt. General Todd Semonite, who commands the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, toured Montecito's devastation.

trucks at Goleta Beach and Ash Avenue. The samples are sent to a lab in Santa Maria to be tested for toxins, including heavy metals, gasoline, and polychlorinated biphenyls, or hazardous chemicals that were formerly used in electrical transformers. Testing will be performed at both locations at least once a week as the cleanup continues, Shank said.

Tests of mud samples taken in Montecito on January 13-14 by a consulting firm for the county have detected levels of two substances — fecal bacteria from untreated sewage and chemicals found in gasoline and motor oil — that could pose a health risk to cleanup workers. Workers have been advised to wear rubber boots and nitrile gloves and wash their hands often.

All dump trucks carrying mud and debris from Montecito must travel first to the Ventura County Fairgrounds, where their loads are sorted into piles of mud, rocks, metal, and woody debris.

At Goleta Beach, Shank said, truckloads of mud containing too much trash are turned away. After a load is dumped, bulldozers spread it out on a portion of beach near the upper parking lots. County workers pick out

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BUSINESS



SEEING GREEN: Supervisor Steve Lavagnino exulted after the board agreed to a menu of cannabis taxes expected to generate \$20 million to \$40 million.

City and County Talk Pot Taxes

Set at 6 Percent Retail in City; County Goes to a Vote

by Kelsey Brugger
and Nick Welsh

After a successful lobbying effort by the cannabis industry, the Santa Barbara County supervisors voted 4-1 to place a cannabis tax structure on the June ballot that is considerably lower than previously discussed.

The decision means county voters must decide whether or not to approve a one percent to 6 percent tax on gross receipts at each step of the supply chain. In total, the county tax could not exceed 8 percent. (Cumulatively, county and state taxes are not expected to exceed 30 percent.)

houses are already occupied, particularly by winemakers. County Supervisor Das Williams quipped, "Maybe it will ease off the pressure we are feeling in Carpinteria."

Williams stressed a reasonable tax rate would pay for county regulators to go after unlicensed operators. A public speaker capped in a purple visor that read "Tepusquet Crisis Committee" agreed. The committee formed to address the drought but transitioned to fight cannabis in their neighborhood.

The tax measure could function as a referendum on the county's proposed ordinance. The county supervisors disagreed

**"We're looking at 2019
before any shops are open."**

—Graham Farrar

This translates to \$20 million to \$40 million in county tax revenue, according to County Supervisor Steve Lavagnino, at a time when local governments throughout California are struggling with high employee pension costs. Santa Barbara County has a roughly \$27 million deficit.

A chunk of the tax revenue would fund at least 20 new county staff positions for law enforcement and drug treatment.

On Tuesday during a four-hour discussion, County Supervisor Janet Wolf raised concerns about land-use and health impacts. "The whole process has been rolling along," she lamented, adding, "I think we are giving the industry a lot."

The supervisors also expressed concern that they could lose out on tax revenue from cannabis operators who choose to do business in the City of Lompoc, where councilmembers have indicated they do not plan to tax or restrict the industry at all. Wolf, however, noted, "We're never going to be able to compete with a place like Lompoc."

In any case, Lompoc has a limited availability of real estate. State law restricts cannabis producers from being within 600

about whether to place a general or special tax on the ballot. A simple majority is all that is required for a general tax while two-thirds is needed for a special tax. A special tax would require the supervisors to specify exactly how the money would be spent.

Meanwhile, members of the Santa Barbara City Council found themselves dancing with two left feet when it came to figuring out how much to tax the burgeoning pot industry as well as how big they wanted that industry to get. Deliberations were anything but pretty, and the council — still missing a key seventh vote — found itself deadlocked along factional lines more than a few times.

Mayor Cathy Murillo and councilmembers Gregg Hart and Eric Friedman all wanted to reduce the amount of time it will take the new adult recreational dispensaries to get up and operating while in the same breath reducing the tax bite imposed on new operations from what city bean counters had proposed. On the other side were councilmembers Jason Dominguez, Randy Rowse and

NEWS of the WEEK CONT'D

Westside Council Seat to Go to Voters; Deadlocks Guaranteed

A controversial proposal to build a high-density, three-story, 23-unit apartment complex at the corner of De la Guerra and Santa Barbara streets squeaked through the Santa Barbara City Council Tuesday night on a 3-3 tie. Technically, the vote was whether to uphold an appeal of the project, which had been narrowly approved by the Historic Landmarks Commission. Under council rules, the tie vote meant the previous approval stood. For the new council, the deadlock vote underscored the imperative to secure a seventh voting member. That won't happen, however, until this June.

The council voted 5-1 to fill the vacancy left by former 3rd District councilmember Cathy Murillo's mayoral win by holding an election, which will take place five months hence. In so doing, the council opted to ignore the advice of City Attorney Ariel Calonne, who insisted the city charter dictated they appoint Murillo's successor on the council. District election advocates have disagreed, threatening to sue unless the fate of the largest minority-majority district in the city is resolved by election.

Assuming this decision stands, the council — split into two even camps — could experience chronic deadlock. In the case of the proposed housing project — in which issues of density and affordability compete with neighborhood compatibility — the developer already has permits to build six luxury condos, but would prefer to build

smaller, high-density rentals catering to people making 120 percent of area median income. Neighbors came out in force, objecting the project doesn't provide enough parking spaces and is too big and out of character with its surroundings.

New councilmember Eric Friedman cast the last ballot in favor of the project — and against the appeal — but not before delivering an anguished monologue. "I have to make a bet against someone who may be bluffing," he said, referring to the developer's option to build condos instead. "I just can't." Councilmember Jason Dominguez, who opposed the proposal, said no one has built luxury condos in seven years. Councilmember Gregg Hart disagreed, pointing out such condos were currently under construction on outer State Street. Mayor Murillo said even though she wanted to dislike the project and wanted people in the room to like her, she had to vote against the appeal. "This is one of the worst appeals I've ever seen," she said. After the council deadlocked, she stated, "We did our job."

—Nick Welsh



WTF: Councilmember Randy Rowse can't believe the vacant council seat won't be filled until a June election.

S.B. Applicants Re-up for DACA

Homeland Security is once again accepting renewal applications from those in the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program, which had stopped when President Trump canceled it in September 2017. At the time, Trump said Congress should pass a law to replace DACA before its protections began to end in March. Since no such provision was included in the recent spending bill, Democratic senators initially refused to vote for it, thus shutting down the government for about 64 hours. Senate leader Mitch McConnell then made a stronger promise to debate DACA by mid-February. The short-term bill, which expires February 8, passed the Senate 81-18. California senators Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris voted against it because it did not include DACA guarantees. After passing the House, the president signed it Monday night, tweeting, "Democrats cave on Shutdown."

"Honestly, who knows what's going on in Washington," said Diane Martinez at Immi-

years, are possible again. After Trump terminated the program, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra and several others sued to stop Trump's executive order. When a federal district court ruled DACA would continue while the suit progressed, the program was restored last week. The administration says it will approach the Supreme Court.

DACA applicants were brought across the border as children illegally. Most know no other country or culture but the United States. President Barack Obama created the program by executive order in 2012 after Republicans fought against the 2001 DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act and all the successive legislative attempts. The Dreamers' protected status can be revoked at any time, and if arrested, they could face deportation. "Those who are now able to reapply are very relieved," Martinez said.

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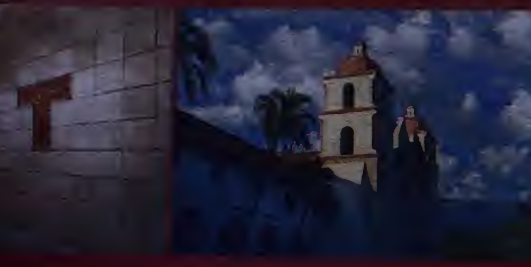
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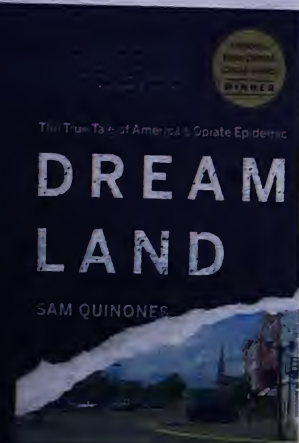
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SAM QUINONES

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MUDFLOW CONT'D FROM P. 11



JOURNEY'S END: Truckloads from Montecito arrive at a quarry near Buellton.

—photographs, notebooks, even a china plate—which are saved in hopes of locating the owners.

As the cleanup proceeds, county officials said, Montecito roads and culverts are expected to be largely cleared by January 31. Some repairs will take longer, including restoration of the arched bridge at Ashley Road and Highway 192, where the mudflow left a mark 12 feet high on the surrounding trees. (Dramatic drone videos show the bridge before-and-after view at the county's Facebook page.)

The creeks below the Thomas Fire burn area have been cleared so that water can flow down them, said Tom Fayram, deputy director of County Public Works. But the masses

of rock and mud that were scooped out and dumped along the banks must still be removed, and that's potentially a job for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, he said.

It will take at least another month, according to Fayram, for the Army Corps to finish cleaning out the 11 debris basins that act as safety checks on the creeks. In the San Ysidro Creek basin, he said, the rocks and debris were piled up 30-40 feet above the rim. Overall, only 40,000 cubic yards of mud, rocks, and dead trees, or 10 percent of the 400,000 cubic yards that dropped into the basins on January 9, have been removed, Fayram said: "It's indescribable what happened out there."

101 Back in Business

Caltrans workers finally got the better of the debris choking Highway 101 after two weeks of struggle, opening the freeway to traffic as of Sunday at noon. The effort involved 350 workers—state and private contractors—working around the clock with countless trucks, big rigs, and excavators to haul off 105,000 cubic yards of muck, all at a cost of \$12 million.

About 95,000 motorists use this stretch of road a day, and for 15,000 Ventura County residents, it's how they get to their jobs in Santa Barbara. For employers large and small, it's been a significant hardship. UCSB was forced to make do without about 250 workers, while Cottage Hospital put up as many as 200 in area hotels.

In the meantime, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers signified the seriousness with which it's treating the disaster by dispatching its top commander, Lt. General Todd Semonite, to Santa Barbara last week for a quick tour and press conference. Overflowing with executive energy, Semonite and the Corps are focused on clearing out the 11 debris basins built in the 1960s to protect the South Coast from flood-born mayhem. Should another storm hit, Santa Barbara's backcountry—scalped and scoured by

According to Semonite, who was dressed in camo fatigues, about 70 Army Corps staff have been assigned to the task, and that doesn't count the contractors hired. They're hauling boulders and other storm-swept debris away at a rate of 500 truckloads a day. According to County Flood Control czar Tom Fayram, that's 40,000 cubic yards that have been extricated from local catch basins and creek channels. None of that, insisted Semonite, is being dumped at area beaches. Instead, he said, it's being hauled to a quarry in Buellton, where it's dumped and sorted.

Huddling with Fayram and County Public Works manager Scott McGolpin after a press conference at Earl Warren Showgrounds, Semonite asked that they review the catch basins for possible changes. If none were feasible, he suggested emergency

NEWS of the WEEK CONT'D



SOLIDARITY: The Women's March turned into the Women's Rally when police informed organizers so many officers were working the Montecito recovery that they couldn't barricade streets for a march.

Thousands Rally Against Trump

Nearly 3,500 people turned out for Santa Barbara's Women's March on Saturday, said organizer Michal Lynch, filling De la Guerra Plaza and waving homemade signs. One read, "Grab them by the midterms," and another quoted Martin Luther King Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

The upbeat rally kicked off with cheers as City Fire Truck 1 drove along De la Guerra Street and many danced along with Janet Reineck and her World Dance troupe. Sojourner Kincaid Rolle swung into her poem "I Am That Woman." A group of Chumash women offered a prayer, burning sage and tobacco.

Though Lynch had originally stated there would be no politicians, both recently elected Santa Barbara City Mayor Cathy Murillo and Goleta School Board member Susan Epstein, who is running for the 2nd District supervisorial seat, spoke aptly on getting women into politics. Two who applied to be appointed to Murillo's 3rd District council seat, Laura Smith, with the reSisters Choir, and Chel-

sea Lancaster, with El Centro, also appeared at the rally.

As the gathering extended into a second hour, a couple dozen people, impatient with being unable to march, started an impromptu walk down State Street, shouting, "This is how democracy looks." They missed much-cheered exhortations on social justice, immigration, sex identification, incarceration, slavery, human trafficking, the obligations of the cis-terhood, Santa Barbara's history of native repression, Halloween in Isla Vista, and "an overwhelming police presence" by speakers from Planned Parenthood, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Black Lives Matter; an eloquent anarchist; and about a dozen more.

With speeches increasingly delivered in angry shouts—one young woman yelled about global injustice, climate change, the devastation in Montecito, and surviving the massive Typhoon Haiyan of 2013—the crowd began to melt away, but organizer Lynch felt optimistic, saying she was glad to have voices that were seldom heard.

—Jean Yamamura

DISASTER WARNINGS CONT'D FROM P. 9

evacuation alerts. Tecolote, Eagle, Dos Pueblos, and Gato canyons were all in the mandatory zone. No voluntary warnings were issued.

Once again, there was a discrepancy between the written press release and the county's official map for the Gaviota and Goleta area. This time, the wording was right and the map was wrong. *Independent* reporters alerted authorities to the error on the evening of January 7, and OEM officials corrected the map soon after.

While Gaviota and Goleta were spared the storm's wrath, Montecito felt its full force. At a press conference this Sunday, January 21, Brown claimed that only six Montecito victims lived in the voluntary area, while 11 lived "right on the border," as outlined on the January 9 map. Those 11 fatalities, however, had lived on the south side of the 192, which that same map clearly described as the voluntary zone.

The debris-flow devastation that ran

hit hardest. The paths of destruction down to the ocean closely mirrored historical surveys of the same geological events and were nearly identical to FEMA's current flood-zone charts, but the county did not use any of these to draft its evacuation map.

The north-south routes also followed the same drainage channels highlighted in another map presented by county flood-control managers during an earlier, January 5, press conference. Bold swatches of red (for the burn scar) and blue (for the flood routes) previewed the impacts of a 100- or 500-year storm. Thick blue lines stretched down from the mountains, then pooled together between Fernald Point and Butterfly Beach as hypothetical mudslides clogged bridges and overwhelmed catch basins, spilling debris into neighborhoods—the exact scenario that played out in the dreadful morning hours of January 9.

The flood map was published on January 5 on the county's website. It allowed residents

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CANNABISTAX CONT'D FROM P. 12

the number of recreational retail outlets City Hall would allow reduced from five — approved late last year — to three. That's in addition to a maximum of three allowed medical dispensaries. (Of those, none are currently in operation.)

Ironically, a very large cannabis operator headquartered in Santa Barbara — Cannadecent — argued as well that the number of retail outlets should be reduced; if the market gets oversaturated, representatives predicted, there would be a "race to the bottom" in the weed trade.

City Hall bean counters initially proposed imposing a 6 percent tax on retail operations and 6 percent, too, on manufacturing operations. Because county supervisors voted Tuesday to drop the manufacturing tax to 3 percent (from 6 percent), Hart argued the city should do likewise or risk losing the lucrative manufacturing business.

After considerable back and forth, the council agreed to reduce the taxes on manufacturing, but to maintain the 6 percent tax on retail. In both deliberations, it was council newcomer Sneddon who made the successful motion and also provided the key swing vote to secure the majority needed. By meeting's end, it was clear to all that the brave new world of legalized recreational pot was still many moons away within city limits. As cannabis entrepreneur Graham Farrar lamented, the net effect of all the city's rules and regulations was the same as an outright ban. "We're looking at 2019 before any shops are open," he complained. Retail applications are due no later than March 20 and will be rated competitively. Final selection is scheduled for May 20.

DISASTER WARNINGS CONT'D FROM P. 15

that flood map with their evacuation map, which did not display predicted flood paths. Lewin said later he thought making both maps available would confuse residents.

In the days leading up to the storm, forecasters said the flood risk was 10 times greater than in a normal year. But they later said they could never have anticipated the record-breaking downpour or the massive size of the debris flows that followed. "The expectation was that rainfall of one inch per hour could kick something loose, but that it wouldn't go very far," said Kevin Cooper, a biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, who consulted on the evacuation map. "As slopes lessen, the debris drops out. For something to push all the way out to the ocean like it did, it had to be an extraordinary event." By the end, Montecito received about 3.3 inches of rain. Of that, a half inch fell within five minutes. According to county records, it was a 200-year event.

Some of the victims were dragged more than a mile from their homes. Brown said recovery teams continue to comb the area for the remains of Cantin and Sutthithepa. "It's very possible that they could be underneath a significant amount of mud that is drying and has to be removed," he said. "It's possible one or more of them could have been swept out to sea."

In the days immediately following the disaster, Brown dismissed questions about the adequacy of the evacuation orders. He said trying to identify where in the evacuation zones victims lived and where the majority of the damage was concentrated was "splitting hairs" and a disservice to first responders, whose heroic efforts remain undisputed.

In the days before the storm arrived, Lewin continually stressed that all Montecito residents needed to take personal responsibility for their own safety. Sign up for the county's alerts, he urged. Check the map. Make a plan. "But unfortunately, unlike in the fire, where we could merely say to evacuate ahead of time, sometimes evacuation isn't the best choice," he said during the



DEVASTATION: The four-times-stronger-than-expected storm that hit Montecito on January 9 cost 21 people their lives.

January 5 press conference. "Sometimes the best thing for people to do is to go to their neighbor's home that's on high ground to get out of harm's way. Sometimes the best action is to merely shelter in place."

At 2:46 a.m. on the night of the storm, as the hills started to slide, OEM sent a flash-flood cell-phone alert to Montecito residents registered with the county's digital emergency notification Aware & Prepare program, saying: "GO TO HIGH GROUND."

Recipients have since complained the directive was unclear. While some interpreted it to mean run outside and head uphill, Eric Boldt, a National Weather Service warning coordination meteorologist in Oxnard, explained such messages in flash-flood situations actually mean stay put. "Go to the highest part of your house," he said, "an attic or even a countertop." It makes little sense to try and outrun a debris flow, he went on. "It's better to evacuate before the storm starts."

Records show that approximately 41,000 Santa Barbara County residents — or just above 10 percent of the total population — have opted into the Aware & Prepare program. Lewin couldn't say how many of them lived in Montecito.

Opinions CONT'D

CAPITOL LETTERS

Unintended Consequences

In 'Dump Trump' Climate, Democrats Flock to Run for Congress — Which May Help GOP

At first glance, the surprise retirements of two entrenched and embattled Southern California Republican Congress members is terrific news for Democrats, in their desperate bid to seize control of the House in November's midterm elections.

Well, watch what you wish for, Dems. Quick update for those who've been focused on more existential matters of fire

directly to Trump, in a field packed with Democrats.

A notable example of the kind of Republican profile that could prevail despite anti-Trump sentiment: Assemblymember Rocky Chávez, whose relatively moderate positions on taxes, immigration, and offshore drilling depart from those of our 46 percent 45th president, and who wasted no

It would be a cruel irony if Democrats fail in November because of an abundance of enthusiasm within their party.

and flood: In recent weeks, Donald Trump's overwhelming unpopularity in California inspired representatives Darrell Issa and Ed Royce, a pair of routinely reelected fixtures amid the state's Republican small congressional delegation, to call it quits.

Both longtime incumbents, from San Diego and Orange County, were key targets in an aggressive national Democratic strategy to land the House by ousting GOP members in districts Hillary Clinton won in 2016.

In a political paradox, however, California's top-two primary rules now may make it less likely that Democrats will prevail for the seats. Because so many galvanized party wannabes are signing up to run, chances now increase that newly minted Republicans could finish one-two in the primaries, freezing the Dems out come fall runoffs.

"Prior to the retirement announcements, Democrats have been pounding for months on Royce and Issa, yoking the two vulnerable Republicans to a president loathed in this heavily Democratic state," noted the redoubtable political reporter David Siders. "But with no GOP incumbent in either race — and with Democratic candidates threatening to splinter their party's share of the vote — Democrats now face the prospect of getting scrubbed entirely from the November ballot."

So motivated are Democrats by their contempt for Trump (66-to-30 percent disapproval in a recent UC Berkeley poll) and his radical right-wing policies, in fact, that nearly 70 party contenders are campaigning in the 14 GOP-held districts in the state — dozens more than ran for those seats in the past three congressional elections combined. In Royce's 39th District alone, seven viable Democrats are battling each other for party voters, while four already are seeking Issa's seat in the 49th.

time filing for Issa's seat about 12 seconds after the nine-term incumbent called it quits.

Not only the seats of Issa and Royce but also those of five other pro-Clinton Republican House members in Orange County and the Central Valley are critical to Dem hopes of flipping 24 GOP seats nationally to win the House — and a fragment of Beltway power.

In midterm elections, Democratic performance often wanes because of low turnout by their voters, compared to the GOP. It would be a cruel irony if Democrats fail in November because of an abundance of enthusiasm within their party.

Election updates. The top-two primary may hinder Dems in some local races, but it doesn't hurt at all in statewide contests.

Two party worthies, Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom and former L.A. mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, according to both Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies poll and the Public Policy Institute of California survey, are running well ahead of Republican contenders John Cox and Travis Allen, the latter of whom hold single-digit percentages among likely voters.

This sets up scenarios for an all-Democrat runoff in November between Newsom, campaigning as the tribune of the party's left wing, and the more pro-business Villaraigosa, who's urging Latinos to make history by electing him. In the U.S. Senate race, Dianne Feinstein holds a comfortable lead over State Senate President Kevin de León.

He hopes to capitalize on anti-Trump fever, portraying the moderate incumbent as wishy-washy. However, his institutional connections to Sacramento's



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Opinions

CONT'D



FINDING EQUILIBRIUM: Members of Montecito Fire Protection District at the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

Healing a Community

An Example from Montecito Fire on Dealing with Tragedy

BY JOHN ABRAHAM POWELL,

Director, Montecito Fire Protection District Board

For first responders, the moment an incident like the flood goes from “rescue” to “recovery” is when they allow themselves, officially, to begin the process of psychologically and emotionally dealing with what just happened in our community. Until then, the men and women in fire, law enforcement, and many public agencies have put themselves last — and you first. Rescue is no time for processing emotions about what is happening. It is a time of action — completely and relentlessly focused on helping others.

For the community, there’s no official dividing line like this. Emotions have run high for most of us since the flames sparked in Santa Paula. This little story about how Montecito Fire is dealing with tragedy could help us all take the next steps.

January 16 was when the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was triggered by the “recovery” transition for Montecito Fire Protection District. When you see these women and men out there, know that all the trauma, all the deaths, injuries, and saves, just landed in their hearts. This experience can be overwhelming. This is the first time they are allowed to just be humans again, to have feelings and to acknowledge that they might have a lot of pain in their hearts. Some do not have a home to go back to, and they are all worrying about their families and friends like the rest of us.

Here is a small example of how firefighters understand and support each other during this transition from crisis back into regular life: When Montecito Fire was dispatched to the stress debriefing, another fire agency had to staff our stations to cover any calls and to protect the public. Our fire stations are staffed 24/7/365 no matter what, and firefighters are trained to watch each other’s backs. A strike team from SoCal led by Laguna Beach Division Chief Tom Christopher came in to do that job.

While they worked in our station, the team and Chief Christopher personally washed all of our filthy, muck-covered engines, trucks, and cars and then

solidarity. Our women and men were coming fresh out of their stress debriefing and were feeling raw. They were also being given leave from the flood zone for the first time since they were all called in two days before the flood.

Firefighters don’t ever want to leave a mess in their station. Hours of cleaning muck off of engines right after being told that it’s time to begin the process of dealing with the memories, trauma, and feelings about the two biggest disasters in our community’s history — that is a tough task.

Tom Christopher’s team knew this, so they cleaned our stuff before our people got back to the station. By doing that particular chore for our people, at that particular moment, they sent a message loud and clear: “We get it, and we feel you — brothers and sisters.”

This is a simple lesson for all of us. We know that we can’t just make this monstrous trauma right for everyone in this time of grief and hardship, but we can all make thoughtful gestures of kindness to the people who are hurting around us. Thoughtfulness is an important part of this approach to kindness. To get it right, you have to empathize and put yourself in the shoes of the person you are trying to help, because some acts of kindness can be overwhelming when people have experienced trauma. In fact, sometimes it is actually not grand gestures that are called for in moments like this. Consistent small kindnesses we can offer each other can be a great comfort to both those giving and those receiving them.

The SoCal Strike Team got it just right. I think we can all learn from their example: We can watch each other’s backs and engage in thoughtful acts of kindness to begin the process of healing this wounded community.

The Strike Team members were from the cities of Brea, Engine 322 (Captain Williams, Engineer Jones, Firefighters Pitts and Basaites); Anaheim, engines 309 (Capt. Mosman, Eng. Verdica, FFs Ingram and Vaughn), 301 (Capt. Colonelli, Eng. Neuhausen, FFs Collins and Allred), and

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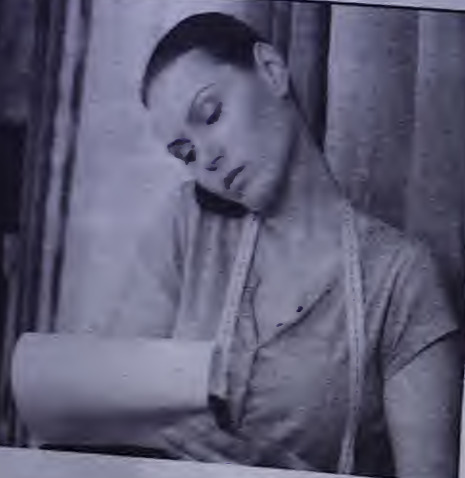
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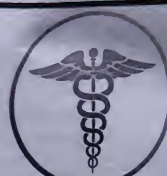
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WHERE'S MY WEED?

You couldn't walk through downtown Santa Barbara on New Year's Day without smelling weed.

Friends out to lunch could be heard casually chatting about it, and teenagers lit up as they strolled down the street. Meanwhile, all across the state, hippies three times their age rejoiced, never having thought they'd live to see the day when marijuana was legalized.

Weed was coming out of the shadows.

But today, almost a month since the state of California allowed the sale of cannabis for recreational purposes, how far do Santa Barbara residents have to go to find a shop that sells legal marijuana?

The answer, at least for now, is Los Angeles County.

That's where I went a few days into the New Year. After a two-hour jaunt down Highway 101, I found myself walking past the Russian bakeries, pawn shops, and bodegas of Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood. A block past Fairfax, I reached Alternative Herbal Health Services, where a man who calls himself "Bird" was perched behind an iPad. He welcomed customers to what he emphatically described as an "adult-use" cannabis shop—dismissing the term "recreational" as "flamboyant"—and took photographs of my license, which he entered into a digital database. Then Bird directed me to a doorway overseen by a security guard who

HOW SANTA BARBARA COUNTY JURISDICTIONS ARE DEALING WITH MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

BY KELSEY BRUGGER



in the corner. Vaporizer pens and handblown pipes filled glass display cases. A stack of *Green Buds and Hash*, a parody of the Dr. Seuss children's book, sat on a bookshelf. The shop had partnered with the Netflix series *Disjointed*, so the series played on a big-screen TV in the foyer.

I felt like a deer in headlights, overwhelmed by brand names and strains of cannabis. A bud-tender explained the psychoactive effects of sativa, indica, and hybrid strains. "Take your time," she said patiently as I scanned the products. Card-carrying medical-marijuana patients had their own line and weren't forced to wait behind the many people who were visiting a dispensary for the first time.

I picked out an assortment: one pack of gummies; two prewrapped rolls, Chem Scout and Cali Chem; a gram of Blue Crush; and a gram of Sztitz. (Customers can purchase up to an ounce, which equals 28.3 grams.) The checker packaged the purchase in a champagne-colored, heavy-duty plastic pouch that fastened with a childproof lock. It came out to \$77. (Taxes were 25 percent.)

By about 11 a.m., more patrons had made their way in. A middle-aged woman wearing purple shoes and a purple jogging jacket, a skinny young kid who must have had a fake ID, and a stocky man in sweatpants awaited their turn with the two female bud-tenders.

“Gratitude makes sense of our past brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.”

~ Melody Beattie

Fire and flood. We've been through a rough patch, and the devastating losses suffered by so many have taken their toll on all of us.

As a school with two campuses that stood squarely in the path of destruction—and yet were spared—we are beyond thankful. And the emergency responders who showed us by their actions the true meaning of selflessness have our eternal gratitude.

We are also thankful for the strength and resilience of our community. The love, caring, and support that flow so freely to the victims of these disasters are welcome expressions of beauty in a time of great sadness.

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Joe Garcia, president of the Lompoc Valley Cannabis Coalition

No, Really, Where's My Weed?

The new state law, which 57 percent of voters approved in November 2016 through Proposition 64, calls on each jurisdiction to adopt its own ordinance, so the rules surrounding recreational cannabis sales differ wildly from city to city and county to county across California. Even in just the microcosm of Santa Barbara County, lawmakers have vastly different ideas about how much cannabis should be grown and how it should be sold in their neighborhoods.

County and city officials started navigating this new frontier last year, holding numerous meetings on the topic. But staffers started scratching their heads even more vigorously in November, when state officials released a series of last-minute regulations. Jurisdictions statewide are still scrambling to comply.



CARLIN FITCH

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Cannabis producers have had years of practice developing product lines thanks to the more than 20 years that medical marijuana has been allowed in California, as well as a couple of years of legalization in other states. In California, people who are at least 21 years old can buy an ounce (28.3 grams) at a time. Like alcohol, if you “open” the container, the law requires you to put the product in the trunk of the car.

Your options at a pot shop are likely to include the following:

RAW CANNABIS: There is a baffling array of sativa, indica, and hybrid strains to choose from.

PRE-ROLLS: These pre-rolled joints take the hassle out of rolling your own.

SHAKE: A less expensive bag of little pieces of bud trimmings that can be used to make infused butter or oil, among other things.

VAPORIZERS: Cartridge delivery systems use vapor rather than smoke, which is less harsh.

EDIBLES: Gummies, truffles, chocolate bars, and much more feature accurate measurements of the THC and other cannabinoids inside.

SMOKING DEVICES: Pipes, bongs, rolling

“My personal opinion is that this is a huge clusterfuck and the state erred in its launch of the industry in the manner it has,” summed up Joe Garcia, president of the Lompoc Valley Cannabis Coalition.

Further complicating matters, cannabis cultivators, distributors, and purveyors previously operating under medical-marijuana laws now need new temporary state licenses. So far, 132 temporary cultivation licenses have been issued in Santa Barbara County, which translates to 30 acres countywide.

As one grower explained, “The market has been dead since January 1 for all reputable operators.” Ironically, more cannabis operators were in compliance on December 31 than were on January 1.

To shed light on this dim landscape, I've spoken to dozens of cannabis-industry players as well as politicians, bureaucrats, and attorneys, many of whom agreed only to talk off-the-record since cannabis remains a Schedule 1 drug under federal law, the same category as heroin. While there's still a lot up in the air, here's a brief rundown of what I learned about how the policies differ from Carpinteria to Lompoc to Santa Maria and everywhere in between.

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA: For years, Santa Barbara has been a

Weedmaps.com reveals Green Cuisine Delivery Santa Barbara, S.B. Alternative Healing, and Ocean Side Express as just a few of the 20 options.

It's easy to do. For new patients, all it takes is a 10-minute Skype interview with a doctor. Within an hour, a guy who looks like an Uber driver arrives at your doorstep with a sealed bag of prewrapped rolls or plastic capsules of dried cannabis flowers. You hand him a wad of cash, and the delivery dude is on his way.

These services have existed in a gray area for quite some time, and as of January 1, they remain on the black market. Eventually, brick-and-mortar retail competition is expected to eradicate this market, if law enforcement doesn't get there first. Don't expect 20 options to remain on *weedmaps.com* for long.

Under the new law, these delivery services legally must be tethered to a retail shop. Optimistic operators hope to open retail shops in the city as soon as May. Others believe the first one will not open until 2019. After all, the city adopted an ordinance for retail medical marijuana eight years ago, but no dispensaries have existed for several years.

Canopy Club, Ryan Howe's proposed Milpas Street medical-marijuana shop, has come the closest to opening. Last fall, it was just days away from opening after years of appeals from residents who argued the Eastside corridor was home to many K-12 schools and therefore unsuitable for pot dens. But then the City Attorney's Office announced it had investigated a tip from a resident that Howe had improperly tried to bring on new owners without notifying City Hall.

At a hearing before Staff Hearing Officer Susan Reardon in December, Howe blamed the whole thing on his former attorney, Joe Allen. On January 19, Reardon announced her decision not to revoke the permit. The decision can be appealed to the Planning Commission.

Two other proposed medical-marijuana retail shops—one by Allen on upper State Street and the other by Ihab Ghannam on De la Vina Street—have endured years of appeals and public hearings. (Ghannam's dispensary was approved last August, but Allen's permit was revoked that same month.) That doesn't exactly

“THE MARKET HAS BEEN DEAD SINCE JANUARY 1 FOR ALL REPUTABLE OPERATORS.”

bode well for the five potential recreational retail shops that the S.B. City Council voted in November to allow. However, recreational shops will not be subject to the same appeals process, according to the city's cannabis ordinance. While a public hearing must be held, residents can merely raise concerns, not continually appeal the permits.

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA: One of the first Santa Barbara



MEDS ON MILPAS: Hopeful Santa Barbara cannabis operator Ryan Howe (left) sits with his attorney, Peter Candy of Hollister & Brace, at a city hearing.



TENDING THE FARM: Harvest manager Christina Seng monitors the plants at an area cannabis greenhouse.

Sixteen years later, he employs 60 people. He plans to expand his cannabis business every year.

Throughout the county, at least 400 acres of cannabis are already being grown, according to self-reports submitted to county government. These plants are under hoop houses in outdoor fields near Lompoc, indoor warehouses in Goleta, and, particularly, in greenhouses in the unincorporated area of Carpinteria Valley.

So where is it all going?

Santa Barbara County growers have sold much of their processed product to medical-marijuana dispensaries in Los Angeles. But temporary state licenses for those to remain open legally are stalled in L.A.'s own regulating quagmire. (L.A.'s “social equity program” aims to reverse past war-on-drugs wrongs committed against predomi-

nantly black and Latino people by putting those with marijuana convictions first in line to receive cannabis-related permits. The program, however, has yet to kick off.)

A bigger hurdle, growers say, is that Santa Barbara County has yet to issue distribution licenses that would allow cannabis to be transported from farms to retail shops. Last

year this snafu emerged in Nevada. State regulators declared a state of emergency. Without distribution licenses, there was no way for the cannabis to legally get to retailers.

The same setback has unfolded here. Santa Barbara growers say they used to distribute their own product. But under the new law, they need a distribution permit. And according to one grower, the only existing licensed distributors are seeking up to 45 percent in fees. “I'm not willing to pay that,” he said.

During this legal limbo, he is worried his own distributors who do not have permits will be stopped by law enforcement and subject to arrest. He hasn't made a single sale since the first of the year. He is afraid to operate outside the law because that could jeopardize his ability to get future licenses.

CITY OF GOLETA: Goleta is home to three medical-marijuana dispensaries that were grandfathered in when the Goleta City Council adopted a ban in 2009. These non-profit collectives have received letters of authorization from the City of Goleta to apply for temporary state licenses, said Winnie Cai, deputy city attorney.

The future of recreational cannabis businesses, though, is unclear. There are many warehouses in Goleta that could be converted to space for manufacturing, the process by which psychoactive elements are extracted from cannabis leaves. City staff has held multiple hours-long workshops, and the Goleta City Council will address the regulatory issues at a meeting next month. Cannabis advocate Crystal Reyes said she believes the Goleta City Council will not adopt an ordinance allowing recreational growing, manufacturing, and retail sales within the city limits. But some city council members have indicated that would

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Restaurants Begin to Reopen in Montecito

WELCOME BACK: Stella Mare's reopens after flood-related freeway closures ended all public access to the restaurant.

With the reopening of Highway 101 and Coast Village Road, Stella Mare's Bistro at 50 Los Patos Way is one of many restaurants in the Montecito area to try to make a comeback after the devastating floods and debris flows. I spoke with Danny Casillas, manager at sister restaurant Café Stella, who told me that owner Philippe Rousseau hopes to be back in business Thursday, January 25.

"Thank you to everyone who has reached out to us, and thank you for your support," said Rousseau. "Stella Mare's and our staff are all safe, and the restaurant suffered very little damage, but there is so much destruction and personal tragedy around us in our community. Many thanks to the first responders, volunteers, and anyone working so hard since this tragedy occurred. Thank you for their tireless efforts. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all our friends and neighbors! Our staff is anxious to get back to work, and we are looking forward to see all your familiar faces!"

SAN YSIDRO RANCH UPDATE: Last weekend, I was at the celebration of life for beloved bartender Sunny Quinn, who worked at Mel's Lounge and Pascucci Restaurant and lost her battle with cancer last December. While talking with several of the hundreds of people in attendance, I was told a few things about the restaurants at San Ysidro Ranch at 900 San Ysidro Lane, which suffered extreme damage from debris flow during the tragic January 9 floods in Montecito. None of the information I received has been confirmed. Though some maps showed otherwise, I was told that The Stonehouse and Plow & Angel building is not destroyed, which would be a relief to many fans of the popular venue. I was also told that San Ysidro Ranch owner, billionaire Ty Warner, is continuing to pay full salary, including tips, to restaurant staff. That is amazing if true.

MESA BURGER HELPS EVACUEES: Until the end of January, Mesa Burger at 315 Meigs Road is offering free meals to evacuees of the horrific Montecito floods. Mesa Burger had run an earlier promotion where 50 percent of all proceeds went to Direct Relief. Mesa Burger is open daily, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.

HOW TO HELP RESTAURANTS? This just in from reader Jessica: "A couple nonprofits I'm on the board of

would love to help local restaurants. Do you know of any local restaurants that have been particularly hard-hit by the fire/mudslides for which we could provide funds to host a buffet-style meal for evacuees and first responders? Just trying to do the most good!" If you send a message to my email address below, I will forward it to Jessica.

MUNDOS UPDATE: Reader Brendan says that Mundos at Canon Perdido and Milpas (the building with the cow) has a sign on the door that says: "Under the tragedy of the Thomas fire in December that caused us a financial setback, we had to take the difficult decision to close temporarily our lunch starting Monday, January 15." The sign says they will still be open for dinner Monday-Saturday, 5-9 p.m.

HARRY'S PLAZA CAFÉ 50TH ANNIVERSARY: Reader Brendan also let me know that Harry's Plaza Café at 3313 State Street is having an eye-popping deal as a 50th-anniversary special all through the month of January. Any day Sunday-Thursday, you can get a plate of Omaha slow-roasted tri-tip with fries and salad for \$8. No substitutions or take-outs.

FIRE AT ALPHIE'S: Edhat.com reports that firefighters put out a kitchen fire in Alphi's Restaurant in Old Town Goleta on January 14. I'm told that crews arrived at 5725 Hollister Avenue at 4:35 p.m. after a report of a commercial building fire and discovered smoke and flames in the front of the restaurant, originating in the kitchen. The fire was quickly knocked down, said Santa Barbara County Fire Department Public Information Officer Mike Eliason. No injuries were reported, and an investigator is looking into the cause of the fire.

VEGAN RESTAURANT COMING TO UPPER STATE: Here is a tip from reader Lindsey: "I love your blog and have been following it for the past three years that we've lived here. There's a sign out for a 'Vegan Green' restaurant at 3613 State Street, in the old location of Miso Hungry."

THAT'S THE SPIRIT: This just in from reader Tony: "Interesting development: Alcohol license notice at the Metro theaters at the Camino Real Marketplace in Goleta!"

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